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A Tribute

TO

THE MEMORY AND SERVICES

OF THE

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REV. THEODORE PARKER.

From a Discourse

PRONOUNCED IN THE BULFINCH-STREET CHURCH,

BOSTON, JUNE 3, 1860.

BY WILLIAM R. ALGER.

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THE CHARACTER OF THEODORE PARKER.

SINCE we were last here, friends, heavy news of loss and grief have come across the sea. The most marked and famous minister in America — a scholar, thinker, preacher, writer, reformer, pre-eminent, among all whom we have known, for richness of gifts, indefatigable energy, and a heroism that never quailed before the face of man — has yielded up his soul to God, far from his native land, and been laid to rest in foreign earth. In a future and more favorable age, when the clamor of detraction has ceased, and the hubbub of envious and hateful tongues has been silenced and forgotten, history will reckon this great man one of the most powerful and illustrious spirits of the century in which he lived; not inferior to many in native endowments, first among his fellows in cultured acquisitions, second to few on earth in his indomitable devotedness to truth and to humanity. Rarely do tidings reach us freighted with such solemn import as those which, although not unexpected, five days ago startled the country with the words, *Theodore Parker is dead!* That announcement has such a sorrowful interest for me, and such deep meaning for this community, that I cannot bear to let the occasion pass without at least a few broken words of tribute to the distinguished man who has gone from us, and the remarkable career that is now ended.

An individuality so bold and impetuous as that of Theodore Parker must often impinge against current prejudices, and awaken enmities. For twenty years he played so conspicuous a part in opposition to the views and passions of the conservative class and their followers, that there must needs be a multitude who regard his teaching with disfavor, and his person with dislike. Nevertheless, after all exceptions and abatements are made, he was a great and good man, a soul of extraordinary loftiness of dimensions, and filled to the very brim with those costly virtues, for want of whose inspiring power communities most languish and suffer. Furthermore, the grateful recollection gushes from my heart, that, in personal relations, I was long deeply indebted to his kind friendship. Hundreds of books has he freely loaned me from his princely library. Hundreds of times has he spoken friendly words of interest and encouragement to me; graciously uttering affectionate and precious words which many smaller and less busy men would not have thought it worth their while to stoop to say, — words which surely I shall cherish for ever in the holiest shrine of memory. And now that his course is finished, and his heart and lips are still and cold, far from his dear New England, if I should refrain to speak a grateful and admiring word for his memory, from fear of giving offence to some who were prejudiced against him, I should be afraid that my tongue would thenceforth cleave to the roof of my mouth; I should feel myself recreant to the sacredest duty that ever places its claim on the heart of man. And, in what I have to say, I shall not be careful to emphasize any faults or errors which may have belonged to him: that is an office impossible for me to discharge, standing with dimmed eyes beside his fresh grave. I shall leave it for his enemies. We may be sure they will do it thoroughly. Meanwhile, turn we to a more congenial duty.

Were Theodore Parker a man of merely conventional

greatness or distinction; belonged he to the class of men, who, successfully devoting themselves to their own aggrandizement, or to the support of established custom and prerogative, are honored by the applause of tyrants, aristocrats, and demagogues, the proud, the luxurious, and the selfish, — I should not be found speaking in his praise. It is the rareness and elevation of the spectacle displayed in him of original service and valor, of consistent self-denial and consecration, that constitute the preciousness of his example,— an intrinsic greatness and worth which demand the plaudits of every brave man who loves his fellows, and really believes in God.

"An offering at the shrine of Power
Our hands shall never bring;
A garland on the car of Pomp
Our hands shall never fling;
Applauding in the conqueror's path
Our voices ne'er shall be:
But we have hearts to honor those
Who bid the world go free.

Praise to the good, the pure, the great,
Who make us what we are;
Who light the flame which yet shall glow
With radiance brighter far!
Glory to them in coming time,
And through eternity,
Who break the captive's galling chains,
And bid the world go free!"

This true servant of the people is to be honored for his gigantic industry. In a world of loiterers, flutterers, postponers, he toiled for distinctly chosen ends with a prompt and prodigious devotion productive of memorable results. The siren voices of indulgence, praise, or other temptation, vainly strove to seduce him from those herculean tasks of high design at which he applied himself with a tenacity and an ever-returning vigor that will hereafter

often be cited as a stimulating example. No business plodder or political aspirant worked so unremittingly to make money or to win office as he worked to accomplish the genuine aims of life, to edify his own soul, and to serve his fellows; acquiring true joy; mastering the records of history, the facts of science, and the principles of philosophy; tuning his heart to harmony; blessing society with the fruit of his achievements; accumulating treasure in heaven. In direct opposition to a distinguished friend, I venture to say, that one of the greatest pieces of wisdom and good fortune which marked the career of Theodore Parker was his concentrated unity of purpose. Not frittering himself away in dissipated miscellaneousness of effort, but pouring himself in a cumulative course of foreseeing and single purpose, he will not evaporate like a shower of isolated exertions in the desert of contemporaneous notice, but roll as a voluminous river of influence across the plains of posthumous fame.

A still deeper tribute is due to his invincible loyalty to truth. He followed the lines of light wherever they led him. With unselfish courage, resisting every lure to falsehood or to compromise, he was a pupil, a defender, a propagandist of what he recognized as God's truth. Oh that there were in American pulpits ten thousand like him in this respect, free from all shackles of establishment, to accept realities as they are in the fresh air and radiance of to-day! This trait, in any marked degree, is one of the loftiest, and one of the rarest, virtues of human nature. Most people are content to repeat the traditional doctrines, the prevalent opinions, the fashionable usages, of their time. They are timid, complaisant, and flexible before power, authority, establishment. They have not enough mental impulse and moral daring to start into independence, and engage perseveringly in the lonely task — the toilsome and perilous task — of finding out what the truth is. I have known a

thousand men capable of all other virtues, as it seems to me, where I have known one capable of a ruling passion for the truth. Invaluable, for ever invaluable to an indolent and obsequious world, is the life of that man, who, willing to give up all else, is unable to forego the sight of the truth.

It were an unpardonable error to give any inferior place, in the marshalling of his prominent virtues, to that unweariable faithfulness to the cause of humanity which confessedly characterized Theodore Parker. Think ye it would not have been as sweet to him as to others to draw his scholar's white robes clean about him, and sit aloof from the babel and the squalor of politics and misery, sheltered in his still air of delightful studies? But when his brothers were oppressed, hungry, cold, or bleeding, he felt himself bound, starved, shivering, and faint with them; and he cheerfully made the great sacrifice of leaving his intellectual retirement to work and sweat and lay down his noble life in the midst of philanthropic deeds and schemes.

Central among the high and choice qualities for which this celebrated man deserves to be held up to honor and imitation is his warm and copious affections. All who really knew him on his interior side, knew that he had the deep, tender, yearning heart of a woman. Strangers and foes imagined him a burly iconoclast, a rough hater. But he loved flowers and little children. His eyes were quick to glisten with tears, — sacred mirrors of a generous sensibility. In the last days, as he lay dying, the faithful ones who hung over him tell us that the names of cherished friends, far away, fluttered on his lips, when nothing but the names could be heard. His homely, racy, frequently inartistic writings, are thickly sprinkled with delicious bits of poetry and pathos, spots of tenderest grace and sweetness, like wild roses blooming profusely amongst the granite. If he was intensely and widely hated, he had

the genius to make himself loved also as it falls to the lot of few private or public men to be loved; and, now that he is dead, thousands on thousands of affectionate hearts who knew him only to honor and love him, scattered all over this country, will embalm his image in their souls, perfume the air of the continent with his praises, wherever they dwell or wander within it, and make the sky of his native land the blue forget-me-not of his fame.

Among the many claims of this eminent clergyman to our respectful study and affection, his remarkable piety is by no means the least, — the clear, fervent, healthy type of piety exemplified by him; not the sour, angular piety of dogma, nor the dry and conceited piety of formalism, but the wholesome piety founded on omnipresent mystery, and nutrimented with universal truth and beauty. That sweet and secret love of God, so touchingly realized and sung in the best Moravian hymns, has been known so profoundly, and cherished so abidingly, by few in our external and noisy generation as by him. The writings of the mystics and quietists were the favorite reading with which he solaced his weariness and fed his heart. In his lonely hours of trial and tears, he was not alone; for he felt that the Father was with him. He seemed to lie down and to rise up, to work and to walk, to sow and to wait, in the constant refreshing presence of the Infinite Justice, Wisdom, Goodness. He had meat to eat which tyrants, sluggards, self-seekers, and all that sort, know not of. A large part of his preaching, far more than the public would easily believe, was directed after the gravitation of his own soul to this theme; the verity and the delightfulness of the love of God; the grounds, aliment, and fruitions of the inner life of piety. No hypocrite was he, professing what he believed not, pretending what he had not experienced; and it is therefore significant of much that the lines oftenest on his lips were these: —

"Nearer, my God, to thee;
Nearer to thee.
E'en though it be a cross
That raiseth me,
Still all my cry shall be,
Nearer, my God, to thee;
Nearer to thee."

The chiefest service rendered by Theodore Parker to his age resides not in any new system of teachings he constructed, nor in any literary works he finished, highly important as these are; but in his personality, in the type of character and style of action he exhibited. As a thinker, I suppose it will be freely confessed that he made no discoveries: yet he thought vigorously for himself at first hand; and his works abound in fresh combinations, in original phrases, and everywhere show a cast of striking breadth, and bear a stamp of uncommon strength. His idea of the true ministerial office and function in the nineteenth century, and his own exemplification of that idea, were essentially new; at least, in his career, they had all the aspect and effect of novelty. Instead of perfunctorily serving, in unsympathetic and ghostly methods, a cut-and-dried set of artificial dogmas, or a traditional institution and a separate profession, to be a cosmopolitan master of all knowledge and all virtue, and a brotherly teacher of the same, — towards this idea of the ministry must succeeding generations of the clergy progress, if they would not sink into contempt and die of inanition. In this respect, the example of Theodore Parker's administration of the ministerial office may be of inestimable value in redeeming it from worthless routine, and making it an honest, healthy, fruitful force in the community.

But form what estimate we may of the rank of his ideas and literary works, his idiomatic personality and conduct are the greater things; his original veracity, freedom, valor, superiority to conventional standards, recklessness

of false lustres, fatal determination to see and speak the truth, are, beyond comparison, the greater things. He stands so near to the people, is so like them while far superior to them, — a higher incarnation of themselves, showing them the future results of their half-conscious tendencies, a character and life thoroughly expressed in their own vernacular,— the conduit of his huge pen lay on such a level with democratic taste and the national mind, — that he has won a gigantic publicity, fast becoming popularity; and is certainly destined, as I believe, to wield an enduring influence. To the multitude, his thoughts seem to a great extent purely original, and his speech is of a sort that fetches the echoes straight from their breasts. But if the people, unacquainted with the history of philosophic thought, shall overrate the novelty of his teachings according to some, they will not overrate the *effect* of novelty he has given to them, nor his unique personality and biography, historic henceforth in the full preciousness of their power. Nor in cases like this is injustice done. Admitting that, as a thinker, he was not a peer of the very first; yet, even in this respect, how many of his depreciators can pretend to approach him? And as a leal champion of the right and the noble, a spurner of chains and of bribes, a sworded trumpeter to the charge against falsehood and oppression, who of his contemporaries equalled him? And surely the latter service is immeasurably before the other. Have we not been authoritively told, — know we not for ourselves, —

> "That he who feeds men serveth few,
> While he serves all who dares be true"?

No competent judge, studying the career of Theodore Parker or listening to the reverberations of his tread, can fail to recognize the thunder-step of a true hero. Without doubt, it will be repeatedly said, as I heard a critic say

when the news of his death had just arrived, "He was not one of the seers; not one of the creative minds: I am not indebted to him for a single new thought." Well, friend, for what new thought is humanity indebted to you? Hardly one man of all the men in a century enriches the world with a really new thought. The class of men of creative intellectual genius from all time consists of not more than forty or fifty laurelled heads, blooming in amaranthine glory on the high top of history, grouped and crowned there in unapproachable solitude of superiority. He who finds contributions of new thoughts frequent in modern literature is merely ignorant of the contents of earlier literature. Jonathan Edwards is regarded as a great thinker; yet, in his masterpiece, — the "Treatise on the Will," — there is not an argument which the scholastics had not advanced before him. William Ellery Channing is acknowledged as a great mind; yet there is not one general idea in his rich volumes which cannot be found in an earlier statement. That Daniel Webster was a great man can hardly be questioned; yet his only original contribution to the world was — Daniel Webster. The construction of a novel scheme of doctrine, or the utterance of deep aphorisms, is not the test to decide whether a man was a great and primal nature: but did he subsidize other men? did he stamp himself on his time? did he live in contact with the aboriginal sources of life, sending impulses from the profuse fountain of his soul to refresh and invigorate the inferior multitude? There are different kinds of great origination. The exertion of a fresh force of character is better than the discovery of an original formula of thought; a kindling contagion of soul is greater than a new intellectual speculation; an independent inspiration of conduct is superior to an unborrowed glimpse of insight. And if, right alongside of that burning example of self-sacrificing heroism and spontaneous toil, you

have lived a life of petty routine, free from the frowns of alienated friends, exempt from the rough usage of frightened superstition and incensed conservatism, and can now coolly criticize this man's title to greatness, and claim to honor, striving to chop them down to the smallest, — why, then, shame on you!

Prejudice and envy, ignorance and scorn, blinded many of his fellow-citizens and contemporaries to the mighty spirit that moved among them in the person of Theodore Parker, and to the rare and memorable life he led among them. Little conception had they how long, how widely and loudly, that potent character and life were destined to tell on the future. Ten years after the death of Channing, I heard a prominent clergyman, who for thirty years dwelt in the same city with him and knew all his doings, say, "I had no idea he would become so great a name and so great an influence." Thus will it be, as I think, with this other light, now extinguished in the flesh only to burn more brilliantly in the spirit. There is a modest grandeur of pride in the simple inscription he prepared for the plain gray stone that should mark his resting-place in the Protestant burial-ground of Florence: —

THEODORE PARKER.

BORN AUG. 21, 1810. DIED MAY 10, 1860.

It tells a story more eloquent than princely blazoned monuments, — a story of early poverty, unfriended toil, chivalrous battle, glorious victory, extraordinary usefulness, and permanent fame. In coming years, many a descendant of those who in his life followed him with obloquy will pause there, and do him reverence with a depth of emotion which the scutcheoned sepulchres of kings vainly strive to evoke. Many a youthful pilgrim, full of noble aspirations, will linger there to breathe a sacred vow, and, with the memory

of this indomitable truth-seeker and truth-speaker, gird his soul for valiant service.

Two objections, I foresee, will often be brought against this brave and gifted teacher, this rich and resolute apostle of the time. I am not concerned to defend him from these accusations, but only, for justice' sake, and for love's sake, to testify to the truth as it seems clear to me, who saw him often, and think I knew him well.

First, it will be said that he was an irreverent assailant and destroyer of men's religious faith. It is perhaps true, that, while his personal affections were swift and strong, his ideal sympathies were comparatively meagre and inactive; and that he approached the opinions and habits of other men rather from the outside as a speculative critic, than from the inside as a loving experimentalist. He had not that deferential mind, that poetic caution, that courtier sense of fitness, which would cause him to refrain from the moss and vines that cling on intellectual ruins; but rather that rude zealousness after reality, which would lead him to ruthlessly tear the moss and vines away, making the ruin unsightly and offensive, till its former admirers could no longer recognize it, and must hate him for showing it so. The poetic perception and enjoyment, the sympathy of genius, which he largely carried into other departments, seemed to forsake him — rather, were borne down and thrust aside by stronger passions — the moment he entered the department of polemic theology or sectarian criticism. His tremendous earnestness in the battle necessitated this: it could not be otherwise. It is true, that, while he had a tender reverence for the natural sacraments, his independent and inevitable search and thirst for what is absolute in religion often made him seem contemptuous of the conventional sacraments. Unquestionably he did, in consequence, often offend sequestered good taste and shock complacent respectability. But I do

not think that good taste is God, nor that respectability is final authority. However much, in a fashionable community and an easy age, fastidious politeness, heartless conformity, timid indulgence, and disdainful aristocracy, may imagine respectability to be the touchstone of merit, and good taste to be the sovereign arbiter in all questions, I must beg leave to dissent altogether from that opinion. Are not truth, justice, beneficence, grander shapes, and clothed with diviner command? Is nothing to be pardoned to honest zeal, if it fail to be artistic and æsthetic? In the name of God, much! When an ethical Hercules smashes his club against some hydra-head, even if the spirting blood and mangled mass do shock silken respectability and sicken squeamish good taste, I believe that the shock is wholesome, and that the sickness may be sanctified. Honesty is higher than politeness in the sight of earnest men Service takes precedence of sloth in the court of true honor. Leonidas — the altars, hearths, women, and children of Sparta behind the mountain at his back; the million of invaders at his feet; his short dagger, dripping with slaughter, in his hand; his body disfigured with sweat and wounds; his long locks begrimed with dust and gore; falling amidst heaps of dead Persians, while Liberty hovered over him — affords no spectacle of good taste and respectability. Good taste and respectability were to be seen on their couches of ease or at their banquets of wine. He whom we speak of stood twenty years in a pass of Thermopylæ, fighting unto the death with superstition, slavery, intemperance, falsehood, hypocrisy, and corruption. It was a long agony of devotedness, conflict, and toil, continued until he fell in the trenches, and died a martyr to his work. The question is of nobleness, not of complaisance. Inquiries about taste, prudence, measured propriety, are out of place. Honesty, disinterestedness, heroism, service, are the test words. It is inexpressibly contemptible to

condemn such a man, in such an exigency, because he did not studiously adjust attitude, word, tone, and gesture to the standard of a pampered criticism. Such a judgment, common as it is, is an outrage upon all just ethics of correlated character and circumstance.

But Theodore Parker has an ampler justification to offer for his work of negation; namely, that he assailed only what he verily believed to be false and injurious, dishonorable to God and pernicious to man; and, in place of it, he set forth what he thought to be the lovely and eternal truth of things. He was an honest man and an earnest, and therefore intolerant of those dogmas and usages whose antiquated bulks are impediments to progress, and whose decay is corruption in the air; and he wrought more anxiously to recommend what is intrinsically holy, authoritative, and beautiful, than he did to discredit what is but conventionally so. Let it ever be remembered in his honor, that he was by eminence an edifying iconoclast. Much of his originality lies in this combination, which marks his enormous superiority to most of his predecessors in the work of hostile criticism. Those who charge him with pulling down without building up, removing what has sufficed without furnishing a substitute, show an inexcusable ignorance of the matter they have taken in hand. They criticize falsely, from impulse of their own prejudiced supposition, not truly, from sight of his doing. His elaborate works are pervaded by the anxious endeavor to establish morality and piety on their true basis; to recommend the highest moral and religious life by every justly available species of argument and illustration. If on the one side, with destructive axe, he smote the transient away; on the other side, with plastic hand, he laid the rising courses of the permanent. It is the fault of those whose religious thought and feeling are so corrupted and belittled as to fasten on draggled carpet, staring fresco, gairish candle,

and reeking incense, if, when he points them to marble aisle, solemn roof, cheerful daylight, and blue air, they cry, "You have robbed us, and turned us out of doors." Souls of freer scope and larger port, more at home in the universal house of God, will judge differently. To give solid verity of doctrine in room of baseless error, which was Theodore Parker's steady aim, is the greatest service a teacher can render the world. And suppose he made mistakes. To err is human. His sincerity will justify, his titanic devotedness crown him.

Secondly, it will be urged against him, that he was unmerciful in his invective, a fierce hater. In regard to this, we are to consider, in the outset, the cause and nature of his hatred. If he hated much, I believe it will be found to have been because he first loved much. It is very remarkable, in relation to this inquiry, that in all his life, in the long list of his published addresses, he never once assailed one of his personal enemies, — those who so hated him, insulted and pursued him. When we remember the bitter calumnies which were rained on him; the aggravating attacks of all sorts he constantly met on every hand; the quickness and depth of his sensibilities; the copious vocabulary of sarcasm he had at command; the tremendous arsenal of weapons and power ever ready; the perfect ease with which he might often have repelled the accusations, and covered the accusers with discomfiture, shame, and ridicule; and then when we recollect that not in a single instance did he condescend to retort on one of his private foes, — I think we must confess that it is such an example, either of magnanimous self-rule or of lofty serenity, as has but the fewest parallels in history. In the name of Justice, let it be kept in mind, in judging this man, that his terrible rebukes and denunciations were no effusion of gall over private injuries, no revengeful gratification of personal animosity or vent of characteristic spleen, as many appear to suppose.

A malicious hater does not pass over all his individual foes, and select, as the exclusive marks of his assaults, those whom he believes to be violators of the law of God, offenders against the social weal, demoralizers of the country. Theodore Parker's hatred was utterly devoid of that selfish malignity which gloats in its own venom. It was generous affection, inflamed and precipitating itself against its deadly opposite. His love of truth was the measure of his hate of falsehood. His intense fealty to right proportioned his fiery scorn of wrong. As high as the pendulum of his conscientious passion swung on one side in affectionate service of humanity, so high it rose on the other side on mighty detestation of tyranny. His hatred was not selfish, but disinterested; not malice, but championship. It is impossible to reconcile any other conclusion with the fact, that, so long as sneers and vituperative slanders touched only himself, he invariably turned away in silence; and that it was only when he thought truth and justice, the honor of God, the interests of humanity, were outraged, that he grew so wroth and inveighed so fearfully.

Furthermore, we must notice what it was that he hated. What were the objects of his respective eulogy and attack? Very much on this point a fair judgment must turn: for the essential mark of a man greatly good is not, as some try to make it out, that he is always sweet and calm; but it is, that his indignation and scorn, when they do arise, are always frank and generous. Cold-blooded reptiles alone are venomous. Now, no one can study the pages whereon Theodore Parker has so fully recorded himself, and not see that his soul glowed in admiration before the sages, heroes, saints, martyrs, poets, inventors, the great benefactors of humanity, who have bought our privileges for us with their toils and sacrifices; but burned hotly against false teachers, unjust judges, iniquitous rulers, slothful syco-

phants, the tools of tyrants, and the traitors to freedom. His heart was full of love for the great nameless multitude of the common people, — the apprentice, the seamstress, the student, the mechanic. However rugged and rocky his works, they drip with this honey. Meanness, oppression, dainty haughtiness, refusing to touch a burden even with the tip of one of its fingers, selfish cowardice, calculating duplicity, — these he did hate, with a force accordant with the powerfulness of his spiritual make ; and, whenever he saw them, by the loyal spirit that was in him he could not refrain to set his knightly lance in rest, and drive full tilt against them in the name of his God. He was never found, in word or deed, expressing antipathy to truth and nature, science and progress, liberty, good government, and the universal welfare of man. Unlike some of those whom he denounced, he never hated nor despised the poor and the wretched, the exile, the outcast, the prisoner, the slave, the sick, and the dying. On the contrary, he sympathized with them, opened his house to them, gave them of his time, his counsel, and his means, until the ear that heard him blessed him, and the eye that saw him bore witness of him, and the blessing of them that were ready to perish came upon him.

Finally, it must not be forgotten, on this point, that occasions of wrong and jeopardy do arise in this world, when a sacred fury of conviction and feeling is *required;* that acts of infamous baseness are performed in these days, which *legitimate* a scorching heat of temper, an unsparing heartiness of condemnation and opposition. When the great battle between freedom and slavery waxes fierce and ominous ; when, with high-handed impudence, a new crime is perpetrated against humanity ; when a groggery-keeper, having got a poor fellow drunk on his premises, and taken his money all away, pitches him headlong upon the pavement, and leaves him there bleeding and insensible, —

I say, then it is right and becoming in a man to flame up with a holy vehemence, and to invoke condign retribution on despot, recreant, and ruffian. That is what Theodore Parker did; and, instead of being blamed, he ought to be honored for it. He figures himself, in my imagination, walking through an evil and adulterous generation, feeling as Moses felt, when, on coming down from communing face to face with God on the mount, he found the people worshipping a calf. Some men have not blood enough in them to heave a vigorous wave of wrath from the centre to the circumference of their organism. He had. And this is a consideration to be retained in view; for, while all good men will condemn and withstand every form of wickedness and cruelty, each will do it with a degree of fervor and force varying in accordance with the style and measure of his soul. When an admiral launches his three-decker, we must expect a greater shock in the sea than when a fisherman shoves off his dory. Every man must work after his kind, and in his own stature. They are not always the noblest men who best preserve moderation and quietness. The indifference of dry, cold, impoverished, neutral natures makes this easy for them. The hardness of the task is for rich, warm natures, flooded with sympathetic energy. Nor is such careful tameness always desirable. When their young are assailed, the dove and the wren can be the fiercest of birds; and Scripture tells us that the most awful wrath is the wrath of the Lamb. In a world of trucklers, in an age of trimming and corruption, must an austere moralist never speak in the face of knaves, parasites, and villains, except with his mouth full of meal? Have we really fallen on a place and time where it is pardonable for a scoundrel to *enact* scoundrelism in disgusting traits and nefarious deeds, and unpardonable for an honest censor to *characterize* the scoundrelism of a scoundrel in earnest tones and blunt Saxon? It is just and noble some-

times to be indignant, and indignantly to express it. Did not the meek Jesus thunder on the shrinking scribes and Pharisees, "Hypocrites, affecters of the highest seats, devourers of widows' houses, brood of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?" And do you not believe there are characters now on earth as bad as the chief priests and elders of that old day, and leading lives every whit as accursed?

No man will openly venture the conscious dictum, that the rampant existence of evil is to be winked at, but the verbal rebuke of evil is inexcusable. Yet the fashionable verdict in some quarters, on such a man as Theodore Parker, amounts to precisely that. Did not things enough happen to him, did he not see things enough, in his day and generation, to *justify* the most volcanic scorn? Were the seals all taken off, so that his whole experience and his whole correspondence could come to the light, I trow a story might be told that would make the veins of every high-minded man on the continent tingle. But, without that inner unveiling, there lie his life, the treatment he received, the history of the American Government for the last quarter of a century, the conduct of politicians and demagogues, official and unofficial: look and see.

I think, moreover, that the burning edge and momentum of his invective, as he towered and flamed like a modern Habakkuk, dusky with prophetic passion, will be proved wise and fortunate by the result they produce. The earnestness, the smiting, and the fire, fastened attention on him, and will secure circulation for his influence. Had he spoken milk and water, instead of thunder and lightning, his mission would have vanished in impotence. Where would be the Protestant Reformation, had Martin Luther carried the pale blood of Melancthon in his veins, or the two-faced and non-committal management of Erasmus in his conscience? So with this later Luther of ours, whose words

also were half-battles, and whose sturdy blows will ring through the cope of centuries to come.

It is important, likewise, to see who are the persons who accuse Theodore Parker. Are they those who have ever been promptest to sacrifice selfish ease and praise in the service of an unpopular cause? Are they the most earnest laborers in behalf of the poor and the oppressed? — the foremost friends of progressive enlightenment, freedom, and impartial justice? As a general rule, the very opposite. What complaints bring they? Say they that he was a sensualist, a defrauder, an oppressor of the weak, a liar to the people, a squanderer of his time, and a scoffer at the laws of God? No; but that he was an infidel in his speculative belief, and violated good taste in his controversial writings, and was excessively severe in his criticism of those whom he regarded as the foes of truth and humanity. The class and character of his assaulters, and the nature of the charges to which they are reduced, serve well to show how faithful his life was, and how white his monument will be.

And now that his great soul has gone up to judgment, and his poor form sleeps in the earth, nor recks how they rave, shall petty men, who, as far as appears from any thing they ever did, were not worthy to unloose the latchets of his shoes, stand up and condemn him because he offended their views, their taste and prejudices? Shall the merest fledglings of the traditional church assume seats of superiority, and complacently sit in judgment on his genius and his works, amidst the applause of those who knew little of him except blindly to fear his teachings? With their three-inch calipers, shall they take the smallness of his mind? with their ludicrous ignorance, pronounce on his lack of learning? with their thrice-refined parrotry, declaim on his want of originality? out of their abject submission to outgrown dogmas of folly and fear, bewail

the benightedness of his belief? and, in their hooded bigotry, accuse him of blasphemous arrogance, and doom him to eternal perdition? Undoubtedly they will. This is one of the penalties heroic greatness, marching before the van of its age, must always pay. Mean men thus revenge themselves on it; or they thus seek to appear great themselves by showing how easily they include a great man, and toss off an exhaustive estimate of him. To the despicable nature, the glorious nature looks despicable too; and when an ant measures Olympus, Olympus is an inch high. To these facile critics, whose triumph costs only impudence, and achieves only a stupid exultation in those who cannot judge, and a noble disgust and protesting indignation in those who can, it might justly be said, "Gentlemen, your labor refutes your conclusion, and will secure a verdict against you. Why are you anxious to prove that this man was not a great man? That he makes you work so hard is a proof of his greatness. When you die, hundreds of public personages, all over the country, will not be found striving to prove that you were not great men. Oh! beware of envy; put away stolid prejudice for candor, and you will see how transparently foolish your attempt is: for surely, in the huge array and rush of affairs marking the middle of the nineteenth century, little men do not play parts so great as to hold public attention, on both sides of the ocean, for twenty years."

I do not pretend that Theodore Parker was faultless, or any thing near to faultless: but I aver that his faults were insignificant in comparison with the mass and glow of his merits. I will not deny that his self-assertion was a little stouter than was uniformly beautiful and pleasing: but how could it be otherwise, when all the world were trying to put him down? I am willing to confess that he had a touch of show and dogmatic complacency in his attainments: but then, unlike the ordinary tribe of pedants and

boasters, he had much to be complacent of; and, as Lord Bacon observes, "the fame of learning will never fly very far, unless it be accompanied by some feathers of ostentation." I think he committed a grievous wrong sometimes in omitting to discriminate between particular acts and general character, and denouncing, as radically bad, men who merely happened in the given case to be on the wrong side. But then a carefully balanced accuracy and restraint amidst the frenzy of battle are too much to expect from human nature; and I believe that his main teachings were centrally sound, and his judgments prevailingly just, both in principle and in the instances. I know how difficult the task to depict, with duly discriminated lines and hues of truth, the characters and lives of the living or the recent dead, while yet —

"So warm the affection, or so fresh the grudge;" —

but it seems to me a much more venial error to soften the defects and brighten the excellences from friendship and charity, than to magnify the vices and blacken the virtues from enmity and envy, or injuriously to distort the proportions from shameful ignorance. Standing before the life-work of a great and brave man, I should be ashamed to fix my attention chiefly on the dross and the dregs. How much juster, as well as more becoming, with hasty glance to skim the former aside; and with forbearing hand to stop short of the latter; but with admiring study to linger before the pure metal gleaming, copious and clear, between!

Accordingly, when I have read some of the attacks made on Theodore Parker, — bigoted attacks, disguised as impartial estimates, — denying him almost every merit save that of vigilant and courageous fidelity to the cause of the slave; asserting that, in talent and learning, he was scarcely above the average; and, at the same time, drawing a

terrific picture of the extent and perniciousness of his influence, — turning over the pages of these sermons and reviews, crowded with gross injustice and absurdity, and remembering how aptly they were calculated to cater to the sectarian religionists of the country, — the great majorities in every community, — I confess I have felt indignant in one direction, mortified and saddened in another. And I have asked myself, while there are so many to vilify and depreciate him, shall there not be a few at least to meet the defaming attacks of meanness and ignorance, and speak kindly and generously of him in accordance with the facts? Shall it be asserted, that he, who was cradled in poverty and nursed on hardship; who steadily strengthened his soul in self-consecration and lonely toil; who, in the inspiration of a martyr-conscience, early identified himself with the most odious opinions and the most unpopular aims; who, friendless and unaided, grew up amidst opposition and scorn, in the face of almost unparalleled obloquy and contempt; who for thirty years fought the battle for influence single-handed against conspiring fashion, wealth, conservatism, and professional cliques; who led a life of unflagging study, dauntless devotedness to his ideas, vestal integrity, and loving-kindness to those who most needed kindness; who step by step, with sword and axe, spade and trowel, conquered his way to eminence and power till the fame of his learning filled the land, his words were repeated in many tongues, his name had penetrated both hemispheres, and, at the hour of his death, he had reached a conspicuousness of exertion scarcely rivalled on this continent, — shall we hear it said by unheard-of upstarts that this man was a coarse and inferior type of manhood, of mediocre ability and acquisitions, such an unproductive appropriator as to be deservedly characterized as a mere parrot of other men's thoughts, a wretched infidel, and, on the whole, a sad curse to his

country and his fellow-men? And shall such monstrous assertions be suffered to pass unchallenged? If there are so many ministers in our pulpits superior to him, why have we not heard of them? Great being and lofty lineage prove themselves in rich production and high climbing. How is it that he alone looms so mighty, as seen through the mists by the contemporary world across the sea? No great fortuities of favoring circumstance helped him. All was ordinary in this respect. His extraordinary puissance, persistance, power, made his opportunities, and achieved for him his extraordinary height of position and sweep of influence. It is pitiful to try to belittle his force and diminish his victory; to arrest the gathering current of admiration by a gale of abuse which shall turn it against him in tarnishing spray. Pygmies, with the gigantic force of popular prejudice at their command, may do much for the hour; but not much for perpetuity. They cannot dwarf down into their own dimensions the colossus whose overshadowing stature irks them.

It is at once amusing and aggravating to notice the egregious blunders of some of these over-eager assailants,—errors which must recoil. They accuse him of being behind the times; taking for his exclusive guides authorities long since exploded, although new and in high vogue when he began his studies. No man, as his intimates well know, and as the freshly cut and pencilled books in his library demonstrate, kept himself more promptly posted as to the latest words in all the grand departments of science, history, theological criticism, and philosophic speculation; the difference between him and these critics being, that he followed the first-rate, untrammelled thinkers, whose researches were solid achievements, while they followed the second-rate expositors, who make their teachings conform to the religious prejudices of the uninvestigating majority. A huge oak of a mind, with all its roots and branches on,

flung into the river of progressive thought, swims resistlessly down in the channel of truth. The little chips of minds, caught in side-eddies, as they see the huge oak plunging on, complacently cry out, "You are behind the times. That *was* the way once; but *now* this is the way." They mistake a backward gyre of four rods towards the hills of the past for a forward slide of four thousand miles towards the sea of the future. It is astonishing, the unhesitating facility with which they map out his powers and knowledge, define his limitations and his ignorance. They are so much greater than he, and know so much more, that it never so much as occurs to them, that, in some respects, he may have transcended their mete-wands, and may have thoroughly mastered and rejected the opinions they rest in themselves and fancy him ignorant of.

They say that De Wette gave him all his biblical lore and critico-argumentative equipments, and that De Wette has in his own country long been utterly obsolete. But De Wette was only *one* of his teachers, — one among the many who brought their costly learning to his aid. And as for the obsoleteness of De Wette, and of his peers and still greater successors, these uninformed presumers make the mistake of supposing the vulgar, acrimonious, unprincipled, temporary re-action in Germany for the last twelve years, to be a permanent progress. That re-action, equally infamous in its origin, hateful in its animus, contemptible in its method, and worthless in its fruits, is already touching its close under the rallying influence of such glorious worthies, departed and living, as Schleiermacher, Neander, Bunsen, and Richard Rothe. The man who imagines that Hengstenberg is greater than Ewald, or Olshausen greater than Baur, and that the former can displace the latter, is either an ignoramus or a simpleton. Of course, Theodore Parker was familiar with all these movements, and estimated them at their worth.

Another absurd effort made against him is, to show that he must be a commonplace mind, because, in his life-long warfare against the popular theology and superstitious view of the Bible, he has not devised a single original argument. When scores of minds, of unsurpassed power and learning, had long been engaged on the subject, and had repeatedly marshalled all the relevant facts, and stated all the applicable arguments, how was it possible for any other afterwards to array new facts and deploy new arguments? It would be just as fair to infer that Newton was not much, after all, because he brought forward no new refutation of the Ptolemaic astronomy; when Brahe, Copernicus, Galileo, Kepler, and the rest, had previously exhausted that subject. There are men now who believe in the Ptolemaic system, precisely as there are men who believe in the plenary inspiration and infallibility of the Bible. The existence of the former just as much refutes the mathematics of the "Principia," as the existence of the latter invalidates the theological criticisms of Theodore Parker.

After reading the various depreciatory estimates of him which have been published, and allowing them what weight they seem to deserve; when I glance over the fourteen volumes he has given to the press, crowded with a richness of matter, a piquant peculiarity and energy of style all his own, a comprehensive forecast of the faith of the future, which have already given them a prominent place in contemporaneous literature, and promise them a greatening audience and harvest for many years to come; when I reflect on the four or five volumes soon to appear from the press, probably more attractive and valuable than those as yet published; when I carefully compare these works, as a whole, for breadth, freshness, vigor, glowing vitality, with those put forth during the century by the most distinguished leaders of the great sects, such as Leonard Woods, Nathaniel W. Taylor, Charles Hodge, Horace

Bushnell, Charles Kingsley, Frederick Maurice, John Henry Newman; and then when I remember, with a pang of pity for his hard fate in this respect, that, owing to his imprudent toil in the daily breach of duty, he was snatched away, overfraught, before he could write the great work which had been maturing in his brain for twenty-five years, — "A History of the Progressive Development of Religion among the Leading Races of Mankind," — a work, which, crowning his works and days as he meant it should, would have compelled the assignment to him of a rank among thinkers that his critics, so jealously severe, now will never grant, — then I cannot but feel that intellectually he was a very superior man, a very extraordinary man; while, as a force of character and a contagious influence of life, I plainly see that he was potent beyond almost any person of his time; a man who has widely sown himself, and already come up in a numerous crop, and will come up in larger successive crops.

Vainly will his carping inferiors strive to stamp their measurement and verdict of him on the day which comes after to-day. Time, at last, sets all these things even. When a great man has been, in the main, deeply loyal to truth, God, and humanity, and has done the good cause emphatic services in his generation, even if his failings and sins have been neither few nor small, posterity walks reverently backward, and spreads over them the oblivious veil of charity. While he sleeps the peaceful years away, succeeding time —

> "Will not deny,
> Large if his faults, Time's large apology."

Who sees not, that, for the mighty monk of Wittenberg, age after age is thus gradually stealing away from the public memory of mankind all thought of his frequent vulgarity, insolence, bigotry, immeasurable invective, but fondly bur-

nishing the records which testify to his transcendent might of affection and courage, his unspotted honesty, his eternal contribution to the progress of the world?

Call no man happy till he dies, said the sage of antiquity. Him we this day only so poorly commemorate, in lamenting we will call happy; for he was faithful to the last. No evil chance or ill-omened mood or weak moment made him waver from the rectitude of his genius, falter in his appointed course, or cast discredit on the high strain of his instructions and the ultimate sufficiency of his trust. However many the angry strokes that fell on him from without, he never felt the bitter blows *within* the breast, the remorseful stings cowards and apostates know, —

> "The pangs of chiefs, who, 'mid their foes' applause,
> Resign their standards, and renounce their cause."

In dying, true to all his principles and feelings, he said, "When welcomely you lay this worn and tired frame in the welcoming earth, you shall read over me the beatitudes of Jesus alone." We will not hesitate now to call him happy.

Let us take home the ample lesson of his life. From the contemplation of his surpassing courage, industry, tenderness, severe justice, girded readiness to battle for the needy cause of right and man, piety, final resignation, let us endeavor to gain a higher degree of those virtues for ourselves. Thus shall we profit from having known him. For truly —

> "'Tis sweet to hear of heroes dead,
> To know them still alive;
> But sweeter if we earn their bread,
> And in us they survive."

Talking with him once in his library, on some now-forgotten suggestion I quoted the above lines to him. At the instantaneous re-action of his noble nature upon the action of

the noble words, the tears sprang into his eyes; and, sitting down at his desk, he asked me to repeat the lines while he copied them into his note-book. From the heavenly domain and haunt of immortals where he now dwells, let us hearken while our faith hears him again saying, even at this moment, —

> "'Tis sweet to hear of heroes dead,
> To know them still alive;
> But sweeter if we earn their bread,
> And in us they survive."

In the death of Theodore Parker, truth loses a stalwart champion, humanity a brave friend, poverty and suffering a generous helper, his country an incorruptible patriot, the earthly providence of God an unflinching servant. His most striking eulogy will be spoken in the muttered congratulations of the allies of superstition, luxury, and selfish power, the irrepressible tears of his friends, the lamentations of the unfortunate he has befriended, the sobs of the young men he has helped to an education, the thanks of all who shall hereafter read his truthful and manly words. The double peculiarity of his heresy and his virtue will cause two visions of him in judgment to be portrayed in different pulpits to-day. Some will depict the scene thus: Leaving the body, he goes up shuddering with terror, and crying, "Rocks and hills, fall on me, and hide me from the face of Him that sitteth upon the throne!" An awful visage glares down on him, and a severe voice says, "Didst thou not disbelieve the Trinity? Didst thou not discredit the vicarious atonement? Didst thou not deny the plenary inspiration of the Scriptures? Didst thou not trample on the Fugitive Slave-Bill? Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the Devil and his angels!" But others will see him passing on to his account with sweet serenity of resignation and trust. Kneeling at the feet of the infinite Father, he says, "Lord, thou deliveredst unto

me five talents: lo, I have gained besides them five talents more." And a heavenly voice says, "I was an hungred, and you fed me; I was naked, and you clothed me; I was sick, and you visited me; in prison, and you came unto me. Well done, good and faithful servant: enter into the joy of your Lord." For the former picture, we have the prompting of ecclesiastical bigotry: for the latter, we have the warrant of Jesus Christ.

And now there is a countless host to whom it is painful indeed to feel that they shall never see his face again, but must say farewell to him, — for ever and for ever farewell. His familiar study yonder is deserted long, and will echo to his step no more. Visiting it a few days ago, — as he generously gave me leave to use his books in his absence as if he were at home, — I could not but muse sorrowfully as I sat down and looked about me. His empty coat hung beside the chair. His beloved books, piled in thousands along the shelves, seemed to wait his hand in vain. The desk was there, with the papers all in order; the great ink-stand, with the pen laid across it: but, alas! alas! never again the great heart there, whose throbs shook the table as he wrote, sending its emotional undulations to the limits of the English language. The precious apparatus, lying unused and idle all around, seemed to say, with mute pathos, —

> "The silent organ loudest chants
> The master's requiem."

And I came away, laden with sad thoughts, to return there no more.

Farewell now, noble worker, saintly soldier of God! Many true hearts mourn thee. Farewell, and peace be with thee, dear and honored friend, evermore, as thou sleepest in the classic soil, amidst famous men of all ages and races, beneath the murmur of the tall elms that wave at thy head, and the sighing of the favorite pine, planted by

faithful hands of science and friendship, at thy feet! Pardon, pardon us, sacred shade! that in one thing we disobeyed thy last charge. Pardon us that we could not bear to obey thee in this, that thou wouldst have only five of thy countrymen attend thy burial. Ah! as the news flew over our land, such a multitude of sorrowing friends and lovers as Florence could not hold, rebelled against the modest direction, and crossed sea and shore to swell the sightless pageant and thy long funereal train; and following thy bier, our hearts under the shroud with thee, tenderly did we say to each other, —

"Slowly tread, and gently bear
One that went across the wave,
From the oppression of his care,
To the freedom of the grave;

From the merciless disease,
Wearing body, wasting brain,
To the rest beneath the trees,
The forgetting of all pain.

Bear him in his leaden shroud,
Coffined thus in foreign oak,
To the uncomplaining crowd,
Where ill word is never spoke;

From the rubs that fortune gives,
From the spite that rivals bear,
From the sneer that long outlives
All the praise the world can spare.

Bear him from life's broken sleep,
Dreams of pleasure, dreams of pain,
Hopes that tremble, joys that weep,
Plans that perish, visions vain.

Bear him to the body's rest,
After battle, sorely spent,
Wounded, but a welcome guest
In the Chief's triumphal tent."

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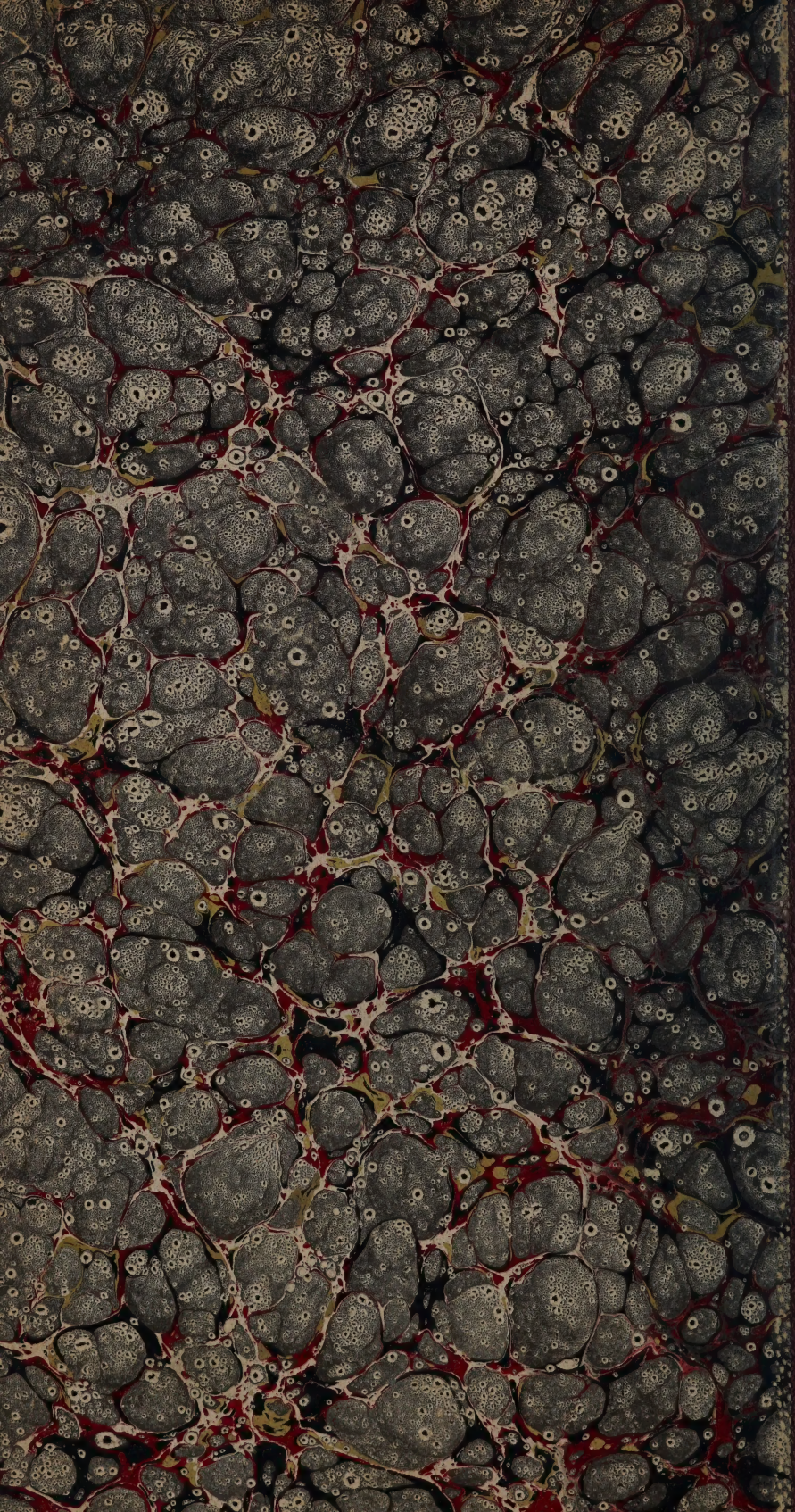
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